

Agi Mishol
To the Muses

Forgive me, immortal ones,
for disturbing you with our history
repeating itself

exactly the way the smart weeds return,
and the purple loosestrife spreads over my lawn,
suddenly it's hard to be gratified by beauty
whose entire aim is itself.

Heavenly ones, floating among gauze scarves,
ivory combs in your golden hair,
what do you have in common with the old women
in the Kandahar hills
gathering crab grass to feed the swollen-bellied children,
or with the women bending over the rubble in Rafah
like poisonous black mushrooms rising from the ruins.

How well I know the language of your wild flowers!
I won't trouble you in the middle of the night
To pet laboratory monkeys,
or plant compassion in the heart of the rancher
burning the horns off a calf's skull.

But don't turn my eyes today
toward the pink lining of the cloud castle,
don't signal the triumph of eternity
in the birds' V.